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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the use of Rational Recovery (RR) as a counseling technique in treating people who feel fat, particularly women. Fatness is viewed as a philosophy, not a physical condition. Cultural influences defining and stressing ideal femininity come down hard on women whose physiques or appearances do not measure up. RR gives people simple information and then encourages people to take responsibility for independently solving their own problems. Recovery from fatness may be achieved by learning dietary discipline. The Addictive Voice Recognition Technique (AVRT) is a stand-alone method for losing weight on any well-chosen diet. In RR the sole cause of food addiction is the Addictive Voice, called the Feast Beast, which is of mid-brain origin, animal-like, and survival oriented. The AVRT proposes that instead of being "in denial," overeaters are of two minds about eating. Among addicted people, the Addictive Voice is dominant, while the "true self" is a faint background awareness. AVRT helps people dissociate from the Addictive Voice through the use of intelligence, self-monitoring, dissociation, and neocortical authority. RR does not encourage a one-day-at-a-time struggle toward a weight goal, rather it encourages a permanent plan for eating correctly, "I will never eat incorrectly." (JBJ)

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Stalking the Feast Beast

a paper presented to the Annual Conference of the American Psychological Association, August 12, 1994 Los Angeles California,
by Lois Trimpey, M.Ed., Co-Founder, Rational Recovery

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Stalking the Feast Beast

a paper presented to
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Thank you. I am happy to be here today. I am the co-founder of Rational Recovery, best known for its work in the field of alcohol and drug dependency, but is recently emerging as a significant voice in the field of weight control and eating disorders. I am also co-author, along with my husband, Jack, of *Taming the Feast Beast: How to Recognize the Voice of Fatness and End Your Struggle With Food Forever* (Delacorte Press, 1994), which will be available at your bookstore right after Christmas. I am here to discuss some problems that are typically women's issues, but often experienced by men. I am talking about the nearly universal problem that American women have with feeling fat. I know about this because I once suffered from fatness. Fatness is a philosophy, not a physical condition. I may still be a little overweight according to some standards, but Jenny Craig no longer tells me how to live my life. It's my responsibility. Most of you here today are women, and you come in all sizes, from very slim, to slim, to average, to somewhat overweight to quite overweight. I won't ask you to raise your hands, but I'm willing to bet that all of you are intimately familiar with the feeling of fatness. It's the feeling you get when you stand in front of the mirror and look at yourself and see a bulge here or there you don't like — the cellulite on your thighs, the double chin, the spare tire, no hollows in your cheeks — a lousy feeling about yourself, a downer.

Most people have "felt fat," and women are particularly disposed to feelings of fatness. Cultural influences defining and stressing ideal femininity come down hard on women whose physiques or appearances don't measure up. About 10% of the satellite television stations are devoted to special diets, exercise machines, classes and nutritional schemes with their empty promises. We hear that 1100 calories can be burned in one hour on a particular machine, for example. We know that in our busy lives we will not spend an entire, boring hour on this machine, but it does sound appealing, and from deep within we may hear another voice suggesting that perhaps just a small milkshake would be justified if an hour would work it off. Large sections of bookstores are devoted to weight loss and diet, and we are told what to be concerned about as well — anger toward our mothers, our child-rearing mistakes, those awful men, and how we were abused as children, whether we remember it or not. Our culture provides us the problem of feminine fatness, and also supplies us with endless reasons for remaining fat. It seems that every diet book written in the last twenty years provides a new set of reasons for overweight, including genetic predisposition, low metabolism, bad chemicals, poor self-esteem, and even motherhood itself.

Women fall for the trap when they try to feel better about themselves by losing weight. They become influenced by diverse opinions, so that finally even the bathroom scale seems to have an opinion! By listening to others, women give up some of their power and authority, and in today's world, that is the last thing women need to do. Seizing responsibility, control, and power gives women a sense of competence, which leads to self-confidence.

Women do lose weight — tons of it — but soon discover that they feel rotten about themselves fat or slim. Disillusioned, they give up dietary discipline, gain the weight back, and become resigned to a lifetime of disappointment in their bodies and in their own capacity to solve the problem of fatness. Feeling worse for the struggle, they often claim

powerlessness, tracing their own failures to the fine array of "reasons why people stay fat." Often fat people form political action groups and for fat people that blame society for discrimination and bias, and attend support groups that focus on background issues rather than dietary discipline.

They rationalize reasons why they did not keep the weight off. They believe, and are often told by well-meaning therapists, that overweight is a symptom of other problems such as follows

1. I inherited fat genes, fatness runs in my family, my inner child hurts.
2. I need to work on stress, and to become more spiritual.
3. I had childhood deprivations which I must first overcome.

Ideas such as these keep women dependent and fat!

Like it or not, there is bias against fat people, and whining will not change it. If a woman cannot get a particular job because of being overweight, she can look for a new occupation or lose weight. Employers will not hire 90 pounders as Sumo wrestlers, and they will not hire 300 pounders as cocktail waitresses. Airlines discriminate by sometimes charging double fare for occupying two seats (unless there is a friends-fly-free policy in effect!) Should the airlines be blamed? After all, they are losing money! By whining and blaming, fat people lose their sense of humor. The consolation prize in this psychodrama is the genuine pleasure of eating.

Rational Recovery has gained a reputation for giving common sense answers to people with problems. We are devoted to distinctly American ideals such as freedom, responsibility, and individual liberty. We are theologically neutral, and our approach is compatible with any viewpoint on religion. We believe that the vast majority have the inherent strengths and competencies to defeat any addiction, no matter how long-standing or severe. RR gives people simple information and then *encourages* people to take responsibility for independently solving their own problems.

RR has re-defined recovery in simple, common-sense terms. Recovery from fatness may be achieved by learning dietary discipline. This may be learned in a relatively short period of time, drawing on ideas with which you are already intimately familiar. To follow is a presentation of our special approach called Addictive Voice Recognition Technique^{sm} (AVRT^{sm}). I will speak to each of you as if you are seeking help with weight control.

Now when a person wants to seize control and lose weight and/or change her philosophy of fatness, she wants to know how to, without changing who she is and what she believes about other things in life. In Rational Recovery, Addictive Voice Recognition Techniquesm, (AVRTsm) is a stand-alone method for losing weight on any well-chosen diet.

Instead of attributing overeating to addictive disease, AVRT uses a *structural* model of addiction, referring to the way that regions of the brain interact. We speak of a two-part brain, one the primitive midbrain, the other the human neocortex. The midbrain, which is essentially the brain of a beast, generates survival appetites for necessities such as oxygen, sex, and food, and uses the language centers of the human brain, the neocortex, to get what it wants. The midbrain is the organ of "yes," and the neocortex, which has a first and last name which matches yours, is the organ of "no."

With AVRT, the game of weight control is rigged heavily in your favor. On the next page, you will find a diagram of the human brain showing the *structural* model of addiction. Some call this "the gameboard of AVRT." By discovering how the brain works, you will finally understand (1) *why* you have continued to eat more than you need, and (2) what you can *do* to reduce your weight and keep it off for good. Regardless of whether overeating is a disease (most unlikely!), regardless of what genes you have inherited, and regardless of what earlier problems you may have had, your food addiction may be understood as *a natural function of the human brain. The sole cause of your overweight is your Addictive Voice.*

In effect, you have two separate "brains" within your head which compete with each other. One is primitive, similar to the brain of a dog or a horse. This we call the midbrain. It is basically the brain of a beast, and its only purpose is to *survive*. The beast brain generates survival appetites that drive the rest of the body toward what it demands, such as oxygen, food, sex, and fluids. In some people, the midbrain is convinced that starvation is just around the corner, and it demands more food than survival requires. The body then stores energy in the form of fat for later use to prevent starvation. If you are one of those persons, you will continue to overeat against your own better judgment, and then conclude that you are unable to control your eating behavior. You are, in effect, addicted to food, because you continue to eat enough to support your undesired overweight condition (and then some), even though it may destroy your happiness. The Feast Beast, as we call the Addictive Voice, is *ruthless* in getting what it wants.

But another brain sits on top of the beast brain, the cerebral cortex. This "new brain," or *neocortex*, allows human beings to be conscious, to think, to have language, and to solve problems. Your neocortex is "you," and *you* can override *any* appetite, even for oxygen. (Anyone can stop breathing until unconscious; starving oneself to death is not difficult.) In AVRT, you will use your neocortex, your *human* brain, your *self*, to override the appetite for unnecessary food. By taking *independent* action, you may avoid "treatment" or diet programs that are costly or disagreeable, and prolonged entanglements with recovery support groups.

AVRT is *you* at work on your problem. For example, if you wisely decide that you will eat less and avoid fatty foods, you will soon hear that old, familiar voice telling you why you should *continue* eating abundantly and/or enjoyably. You may imagine a picture of what you want to eat, and see yourself eating enjoyably to relieve "terrible hunger feelings." *That is your Addictive Voice*. Though you made a wise decision to eat correctly, your Feast Beast has enlisted your language and visual centers to seduce you into overeating. AVRT allows you to *compete* with your midbrain for control. If you compete you will win; beasts by nature are short on intelligence.

There are two parties to your overeating problem — you and "it," the Addictive Voice. "It," the Addictive Voice, is simply any thinking, imagery, or feeling that supports incorrect eating *ever*. With your intelligence, you can *easily* recognize your Feast Beast's thoughts and feelings.

The structural model of addiction shows that the Feast Beast has *no direct means* to get what it wants. It must *appeal* to you to get the amount and kind of food that it "needs." It cannot speak, it cannot see, it has no arms or legs, and it has no intelligence of its own. But it uses your thoughts, sees through your eyes, creates strong feelings, and persuades you to use your hands, arms, and legs in order to obtain unnecessary food.

AVRT helps people to dissociate from the Addictive Voice through the use of intelligence, self-monitoring, dissociation, and neocortical authority. We have found that the ego-alien expression "Feast Beast" is the most apt term for the Addictive Voice, because it originates in a region of the brain that parallels the animal or beastly aspects of the human being. By naming the Addictive Voice, it is objectified, and becomes "not me." As an example, imagine that as you walk into your kitchen you think to yourself, "I want something. Let's see what's in the fridge." Even before you open the refrigerator, you may imagine in a freeze-frame, what's in there, a jelly donut right behind the lettuce. And you may notice that you are aroused for that jelly donut. You can feel the desire. First, you have *heard the sound* of the Beast talking to you. "I want something." It also said, "Let's look in the fridge." (What's this "let's" business?!) You have also *seen the images* generated by your Feast Beast. It is showing you what it wants and what to do. And very importantly, you have shown that Beasts have feelings, and you have *felt those feelings*. Strong feelings! But when you refer to the structural model, you can *dissociate* from those feelings as those of a deprived Beast, one that has little if any regard for your welfare, and one that has caused you much unhappiness and is willing

to have you die to sustain its unfathomable appetite. When the negative feelings are understood as those of an enemy, the inclination to give in is greatly reduced or eliminated.

Your Feast Beast's favorite pronoun is "I." When you hear the thought, "I want a snack," you may recapture "I" by adding a "t" to the "I." Then you will hear yourself thinking, "It wants a snack." After you have recaptured "I," your Feast Beast will resort to the pronoun "you," and you will hear, "You have been good; you can splurge a little. It won't really matter much, especially if you exercise." Sometimes, it may speak for both parties, you *and* it, by saying, "We need a little something. Let's go get some donuts." Recognizing the Feast Beast's use of pronouns is a potent way to tame your Feast Beast.

Once started, AVRT is practically effortless. When you recognize primitive origin of the Addictive Voice, it will usually fall silent, and then return later. It may whine a lot, but *you* are in control. ***Beasts have feelings***, so when you have stopped eating fatty foods for a few days, and reduced the amount that you consume, you may feel physically uncomfortable. This is a normal, harmless phase when your body is adapting. Within a week or two, your appetite will go into the background and you will have more energy to pursue your real goals in life. But your Feast Beast will *lunge* at you and tell you that any discomfort you feel is a warning that you are *harming* yourself, and that you had better eat more, especially "nutritious" (fatty) food. Your Feast Beast, unable to tolerate hunger, will enlist your ability to reason, using any warped logic, to find new reasons to eat incorrectly. For example, your Feast Beast urged you to overeat to prevent starvation; now it insists that your stored fat will not prevent starvation, and you must eat more. When you confront your Feast Beast, it may generate strong feelings such as anxiety, depression, or anger. When you recognize those feelings as your Addictive Voice, they will fade.

Instead of struggling one-day-at-a-time toward a weight goal, you may make a five-word Big Plan to *never* eat incorrectly, "I will *never* eat incorrectly." A permanent plan for eating correctly frightens the Feast Beast because it seems to threaten survival. Therefore your Big Plan may trigger feelings such as anxiety, sorrow, or anger, and endless reasons to postpone the decision. Those feelings are not truly yours, but only those of a frightened Feast Beast. Your old enemy is on the run. Your Feast Beast is just a beast, and it will finally surrender to you.

Because of its significance, The Big Plan to *eat correctly* has far-reaching implications. It is not an easy task to make a personal covenant to never binge again, to never eat voraciously, to never eat tasty, high-fat foods again.

What is correct eating? Simply eating the correct foods in the correct amounts at the correct times in the correct places! When people do struggle with the decision to forsake the pleasure of eating food, and make that commitment knowing that they are in control and can stick to that decision permanently, they experience a sense of relief, confidence, and optimism. We call that uplifted feeling the *abstinence commitment effect* ACE.When you have made your Big Plan, you may feel a great relief. This is the ACE, showing that you clearly understand the concepts of AVRT. A Big Plan changes the way your future looks, and depression may no longer have a purpose in your life. As B. F. Skinner noted, being in control is one of the most powerful reinforcers.

In AVRT, one learns to stay alert for new Beast activity, which may be sudden or gradual. The Feast Beast doesn't give up easily, and it is a strong opponent. When you feel the struggle within you, it is only your old enemy having a hard time with its new master — you. Knowing this builds great confidence that your food addiction and overweight condition are over once and for all.

AVRT is a theory of addiction and recovery that can be understood by any grade schooler. It simply says, "Any thinking, imagining, or feeling that supports incorrect eating is my Addictive Voice, which is my serious personal enemy." In AVRT, there is only one cause of overweight: overeating. And there is only *one cause* of overeating: the Addictive Voice. When you do not recognize the Additive Voice, it will get you to do things that you will later regret.

The Additive Voice has no purpose other than to eat food, preferably fatty, concentrated foods, the ones with the strongest flavor punch. It uses any logic, no matter how warped, to get what it wants. What does the Addictive Voice sound like? It sounds like you! It is responsible for *all* the excuses and convoluted reasons given for overeating:

"I think it started during my adolescence when I started to want to go out with boys. My mother was against dating so she started overfeeding me so I'd get fat and ugly and then the boys wouldn't look at me."

"I'm just naturally overweight. My body has slow metabolism. My mother was overweight, too."

"I eat to push down feelings that are coming up. You see, I have this energy coming up — bad energy — and I have to push it down or I get miserable. After I eat, though, I get guilty and miserable anyhow, so I eat more."

"I was molested as a child and so I got fat to prevent any more sexual attention. That didn't work and my father kept molesting me so I kept eating as a way of getting even with my mother who hated to see me fat but wasn't doing anything to protect me from dad. That is why I'm fat."

"Every time I try to think about my childhood I get all uptight and end up raiding the refrigerator. I must have been molested, even though I can't remember it, and I'm eating and getting fat to get even with my parents."

"Having a baby changed my body. Gaining weight after childbearing is normal."

"I reward and punish myself with food. Sometimes I eat when I'm guilty as punishment and sometimes I eat too much to reward myself when I've been good."

"If I feel depressed or lonesome I binge on sweets. It's like a tranquilizer. I feel good at least for a little while, but then I feel rotten later."

"I haven't been using my Higher Power. When I'm out of touch with God, I overeat."

"I control others by eating. They know if I get mad I'll start eating too much. It doesn't work, but that's what I do. Actually, I comfort myself when I don't get my way, when I can't control others."

"For me, hunger is an emotion and I can't handle it except by eating something."

"I'm busy on step 4, and when that is taken care of I'll come down in weight."

"Eating is a substitute for love. It fills me up when I'm emotionally empty."

"I've been so hurt in my personal relations that I now hide inside my fat body."

"I haven't been working the program the way I should."

"I'm a codependent and that's what causes me to overeat. I cover up my emotions when my inner child is hurting."

When you hear this kind of "reasoning" from your clients or from yourself, your are hearing the clear, pristine sound of the Feast Beast. When it is recognized for what it is, it is exposed, objectified, and destroyed.

People who continue to believe sophisticated nonsense about emotional hunger, compensatory eating, or eating to deal with depression and other negative emotions will have a very difficult time acquiring the dietary discipline that is required to lose weight and keep it off over the long haul. The traditional view that overweight is a symptom of yet another problem, one over which one has no direct, momentary control, when in actuality, quite the reverse is true.

A new book, *Taming the Feast Beast*, will be in bookstores in January, 1995. It is not a diet book, but rather a book to be read along with any other good diet book, or on its own. *Taming the Feast Beast* sets the stage psychologically for people to take personal responsibility for each morsel taken into the body and to make a plan for lifelong commitment to eating correctly, whatever that plan may be.

AVRT is an about-face in the field of addictions, when many people will start taking direct personal responsibility for their addictions, whether to food, to alcohol, to drugs, to sex, or to any other behavioral excess. Instead of needing to be slim, many people may decide to lose weight permanently by exercising control instead of surrendering it.

Must we be slim? How silly. Of course not. No more than we must be overweight. It's your choice! Often those who suffer from fatness (including anorexics and bulimics) have a wish to be slim, mistakenly believing that slim people are more worthwhile or happier or have more friends, dates or opportunities. When people who think along these lines get slim and still feel the same way, the Feast Beast can easily regain control. Remember, there is a difference between overweight and fatness. Your friends choose you by who you are, by looking into your eyes, by experiencing your personality. You can be overweight, or fat, or slim. It's your choice!

AVRT is fully explained in *Taming The Feast Beast*, ($19.95 [CA +7.25%] + $4 p/h.), Lotus Press, Box 800, Lotus CA 95651. Intensive courses in AVRT are offered nationwide at licensed Rational Recovery facilities. Call 916-621-2667.